

“In the Loop”

**Improving Employment Opportunities
for People with Disabilities
in Cambridge**

October 2000

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“In the Loop” Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Cambridge

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Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities to examine the barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities in Cambridge and the services available to help them find work.

Background

It is estimated that there are 4,000 people of working age in Cambridge with disabilities. Less than half of these are working (43%) compared with 77% of the non-disabled population. Nationally, two thirds of people with disabilities who are not working would like to work, and the situation is likely to be similar in Cambridge. At the same time, Cambridge employers are having difficulty recruiting sufficient skilled employees in a growing and fast-changing economy. In many cases, employment and rehabilitation agencies play an important role in helping individuals find jobs and employers find the skills they need.

Barriers to Employment

People with disabilities face a complex and inter-related set of barriers to employment. These include not having the skills and experience required by employers, or not knowing how to go about finding a job. Others fear losing their benefits if they work, or have problems negotiating appropriate accommodations in the workplace. Transportation is the major problem for people who are blind.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

Ten years after the passage of the ADA, local employers have greater awareness of the Act, but remain concerned about the impact of the legislation on their business.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Cambridge

In addition to the main state agencies – Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind – Cambridge has a number of locally based rehabilitation services. Overall, these are well-coordinated, and staff are experienced and committed.

Sometimes, however, bureaucracy gets in the way of good customer service and constraints on funding limit the opportunities for outreach work. It will be important to ensure that as new services are developed (for example One-Stop Centers and Individual Training Accounts), they fully address the needs and preferences of people with disabilities.

Comments from people with disabilities

People with disabilities in Cambridge stress that despite the economic boom it can still be difficult to find employment. They feel that employers lack awareness of disability, that part-time work opportunities are rare, and that people with disabilities are excluded from networks that often lead to employment.

People with disabilities who are outside ‘the system’

Rehabilitation agencies are concerned that there are significant numbers of people with disabilities in Cambridge who need employment support but who are not currently receiving services. Budget constraints as well as a lack of firm data on the scale of the problem make it difficult for these agencies to make the case for more outreach work. There are number of reasons why people with disabilities may fall outside ‘the system’: they may not fit the eligibility requirements set by agencies, may not identify themselves as disabled, or may have given up hope of finding work.

People with psychiatric disabilities and employment

It is felt that people with psychiatric disabilities face huge hurdles in finding and keeping employment. This is due mainly to the stigma attached to mental illness, but other factors such as inflexible employment practices, fear of losing welfare benefits, and low self-confidence also play an important role.

The employer’s perspective

Most employers know little about disability issues. They assume that people with disabilities either lack the skills and experience needed in the workplace or require expensive accommodations. Workplace diversity initiatives focus primarily on race and gender, rather than on equality for people with disabilities. Many jobs are found through networking—making it harder for people without ‘good’ connections to secure employment.

However, rehabilitation agencies report that there are Cambridge employers keen to recruit people with disabilities. Whether this is a pragmatic response to skill shortages or a desire to be a socially responsible employer – or both – the end result is that this climate provides an opportunity to share good practices with the employer community. The City could assist this process by hosting events for employers, providing practical information on how to recruit and retain people with disabilities, and by encouraging employers to become involved with mentoring and internship programs to increase interactions between employers and people with disabilities.

Career Development

Since people with disabilities are frequently employed in entry-level positions, they are less likely to benefit from employer-funded training and development opportunities, and they have fewer resources to invest in their own career development. Employees with poor basic skills are particularly vulnerable in an increasingly complex workplace.

In order to meet employer needs for a skilled and motivated workforce, employers, education providers, and government must work in partnership to increase lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The City of Cambridge as an employer

The City of Cambridge aims to improve the lives of all people in Cambridge. Having a workforce that is representative of the local community makes the City more responsive to local needs, as well as providing valuable employment opportunities for local residents. City government should consider measures to address the under-representation of people with disabilities in its workforce, and to promote the benefits of a diverse workforce.

SECTION 1

Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities to examine the barriers to employment faced by individuals with disabilities in Cambridge and the services available to help them find work, and to make recommendations to the Commission and the City of Cambridge. The research is based on discussions with Commission members and staff, City of Cambridge employees, vocational rehabilitation and employment agencies, local employers and people with disabilities.

The title '*In the Loop*' refers to one of the main messages of the report which is that people with disabilities are all too frequently excluded from opportunities and networks that the rest of the population take for granted. Popular media representations of disability continue to be negative or patronizing, although for the most part people with disabilities are invisible. Organizations promote diversity initiatives – but disability is often either ignored or relegated to a 'second league' while the primary focus remains on race and gender issues. This invisibility of disability is strange when one considers that most (if not all?) of us have family members, friends, neighbors, or colleagues with disabilities. And getting to know someone with a disability is the most effective way of overcoming prejudices and fears about people who may look or behave differently from ourselves.

The report begins with an overview of the Cambridge population and labor market and an outline of the key barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Next it addresses the rehabilitation and employment services in Cambridge, and the extent to which they meet the needs of the population. There is then a shift to looking at the employers' perspective, and a consideration of the career development needs of the existing workforce. Finally there is a section on how the City of Cambridge can increase opportunities for individuals with disabilities within its workforce.

I wrote this report while working as an intern with the Commission during the summer of 2000. My background is in public policy work in England, with a particular focus on equality of access to vocational training and employment support. As a newcomer to the U.S. I am aware that there may be cultural differences that flavor my reporting. I also acknowledge that there are limitations to this study. Time constraints meant that I was not able to talk to all the organizations and individuals who have important contributions to make to the discussion, nor address certain issues in as much depth as I would have liked. I therefore apologize in advance if anyone feels they have been misrepresented or that issues have been missed. My hope is that this report will at least spark discussion, and make a contribution to helping people with disabilities achieve equality in the workplace.

I would like to thank all the many people who helped me with the research and editing of this report. In particular I would like to acknowledge the support given by Michael Muehe and Carolyn Thompson whose constructive comments and suggestions helped me throughout.

Sue Clark

October 5, 2000

SECTION 2

Background

Cambridge Population and Labor Market

Population of Cambridge

According to the U.S. Census, the population of Cambridge in 1990 was 95,802¹. It was estimated to have risen to 99,772 by 1995². The Census indicated that 75% of Cambridge residents were white; 14% black, 8% Asian and 3% of other races, including American Indian. 7% of residents were of Hispanic background (Hispanics can be members of any racial group).

Cambridge is a city that attracts people from around the world...

According to 1990 figures, 21,350 residents (22.3%) were foreign born, including 6,596 naturalized citizens. Cambridge has long served as a port of entry for immigrants from around the world. Many recent immigrants have arrived from Haiti, Portugal, Cape Verde, Brazil, China, Korea and the countries of Central America.

Other than English, the languages most often spoken in Cambridge are:

- Spanish (4.9%)
- French, including Haitian Creole (4.3%)
- Portuguese (3.8%)
- Chinese (3.1%)³

....and has a well educated population....

Over half of all Cambridge residents over 25 years have a bachelor or graduate degree (54%). This is a much greater proportion than for Massachusetts (27%) or the U.S. (20%)⁴. Over 25% of Cambridge residents are enrolled either full or part-time in college.

Fewer than 16% of the population have no high school diploma. This compares with 20% in Massachusetts and 25% in the U.S. as a whole.

¹ U.S. Census (1990)

² City of Cambridge Community Development Department

³ U.S. Census (1990)

⁴ U.S. Census (1990)

...and has very low unemployment rate.

In 1999 the total labor force in Cambridge was 55,073. 54,015 of these were employed, and 1,058 unemployed. The rate of unemployment is thus very low (1.9%), significantly lower than the State average (3.2%).

Cambridge Labor Force

Year	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate	Unemployment Rate for Massachusetts
1990	56,092	53,929	2,153	3.8%	6.0%
1995	53,470	51,616	1,854	3.5%	5.4%
1999	55,073	54,015	1,058	1.9%	3.2%

Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training

Most of the jobs in Cambridge are in the service sector...

The economic profile of Cambridge is dominated by the two major universities - Harvard and MIT. More than 20% of the 113,000 people who are employed in the city⁵ work in the education sector. Other significant sectors are wholesale and retail (16%), business (14%), engineering and management (14%), and government (7%). Over half of all employees are in professional and managerial occupations.

Major employers in Cambridge	Type of Business	Employees (1999)
Harvard University	Education	7,728
MIT	Education	6,985
City of Cambridge	Government	3,070
Mt. Auburn Hospital	Health	2,021
Lotus Development Corporation / IBM	Computer Software	1,708
Cambridge Public Health Commission	Health	1,708
Federal Government	Government	1,479
GTE Internetworking / BBN	Research and Development	1,236
Draper Labs	Research and Development	1,022
Commonwealth of Massachusetts	Government	934
Arthur D. Little	Management Consulting	927
Star Market	Retail	894

⁵ Massachusetts Department of Employment & Training (1996). Note that this refers to the number of people who work in Cambridge, not to employed Cambridge residents.

....and there is a healthy rate of new business start-ups.

There are 3,929⁶ businesses in the city, with 70% of these employing less than 20 people. The presence of two major universities and a large number of graduate students contributes to a thriving new business economy in Cambridge, particularly in e-commerce, biotechnology, and other technology sectors.

Overall, Massachusetts has an expanding economy...

It is predicted that the Massachusetts economy will have generated 400,000 new jobs between 1996 and 2006⁷. A further 740,000 jobs will fall vacant as employees retire, change jobs or receive promotions. 77% of new jobs will be in service industries - in particular in computer software, research and testing, engineering, higher education, medicine, and consulting. Professional and technical workers will benefit the most from these new jobs.

... and employers are looking for higher levels of skills.

In Boston, 80% of entry-level jobs now require a high school diploma.⁸ Employers indicate that the introduction of new equipment, safety standards and quality control systems require more advanced reading and writing skills. Employees are being asked to undertake a broader range of tasks, use more problem-solving skills, and communicate effectively with customers and coworkers. Employers predict that the need for reading, writing, math, and communication skills will increase in future.

Winners and losers...

The winners in this new economy will be those with college degrees, who are computer literate, and who have excellent communication skills. These individuals will be flexible, willing to learn new skills, and eager to take advantage of new opportunities. Conversely there will be fewer opportunities for people who have not completed high school, who have poor basic skills (reading, writing, and math), who are not familiar with computers, have poor communication and social skills, and are not willing or able to invest in further education. Where there are opportunities for this group, they will generally be low-paid jobs that offer few benefits and low job security.

⁶ Massachusetts Department of Employment & Training (1996). This does not include self-employed people

⁷ Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Massachusetts Job Outlook through 2006

⁸ Moss, P. & Tully, C. (1999). Big city labor markets, inner-city workers: An employer's eye view.

Implications for people with disabilities

- The thriving economy should create more opportunities for people with disabilities to enter and progress in the labor market. As employers face skill shortages, they are more likely to consider recruiting people who they might otherwise have overlooked. However, some employers, especially smaller ones, may need information and education on how to reach these populations, and how to meet their needs.
- While people with disabilities with a college level education should benefit from increased demand for skilled workers, those with low levels of education and skills are likely to face stiffer barriers to employment. There are fewer jobs around for people with low levels of skills, particularly in Cambridge. Increasing education and training opportunities for people in this category should be a priority - focusing on improving literacy, math, and communication skills.
- People who acquire a disability during their working life may need retraining to enable them to work in different types of jobs and to use new technology.
- Services for people seeking work and training need to take account of cultural and language differences. In addition to limiting basic workplace communication, language barriers may make it difficult for people to navigate the job search process and to take advantage of continuing education and/or professional development training offered only in English. Recent arrivals to the U.S. may not understand 'the system', nor know what their rights are.
- People of color with disabilities may face double discrimination because of their race and their disability.
- The 'internet economy' opens up new opportunities - and new challenges - for people with disabilities. Telecommuting can help people for whom travel is difficult, speech recognition software and text scanners can enable people with visual impairments to use computers more effectively. However, new technologies are not always designed in ways that make them readily accessible - for example, web sites may use features that do not work with text readers. Public libraries and other community facilities offer only limited computer resources for people who cannot afford to buy their own.

How many people have disabilities?

The chart below compares the incidence of *work disability* in Cambridge, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the U.S. A *work disability* is defined by the Census Bureau as a health condition (physical or mental) that has lasted for 6 or more months and which limits the kind or amount of work a person can do at a job or business. It should be noted that the Census definition is open to some interpretation (e.g. a person with a disability in a job where necessary accommodations have been made may not consider themselves limited in the kind or amount of work they can do, and would hence not be counted as disabled).

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) uses a broader-based definition of disability than the Census, and is closer to the definition used by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but is not available at city level. The 1994/95 SIPP survey indicated that 18.7% of the U.S. population between the ages of 15-64 had a disability. Of these, 8.7% had a severe disability and 10% had a non-severe disability.

The labor force includes all people currently in work or actively seeking work. People not in the labor force include full-time students, home makers, retirees, those who cannot work because of their illness or disability, and 'discouraged workers' - people who have given up looking for work. This last category is particularly significant for people with disabilities - two out of three disabled people not currently working say that they would prefer to work.⁹

From 1990 Census	Cambridge		Massachusetts		U.S.	
	Total	Work disability	Total	Work disability	Total	Work disability
Population (16-64)¹⁰	73,388	4,059	3,944,988	284,229	157,323,922	12,826,449
% with disability		5.5		7.2		8.2
Not in labor force	18,167	2,320	812,517	164,178	37,627,171	7,782,459
% with disability		12.8		20.2		20.7
In labor force	55,221	1,739	3,132,471	120,051	119,696,851	5,043,990
% with disability		3.1		3.8		4.2
Of which:						
Employed	52,398	1,513	2,920,808	103,121	112,085,784	4,372,041
% with disability		2.9		3.5		3.9
Unemployed	2,823	226	211,663	16,930	7,611,067	671,949
% with disability		8.0		8.0		8.8

⁹ The 2000 N.O.D./Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities

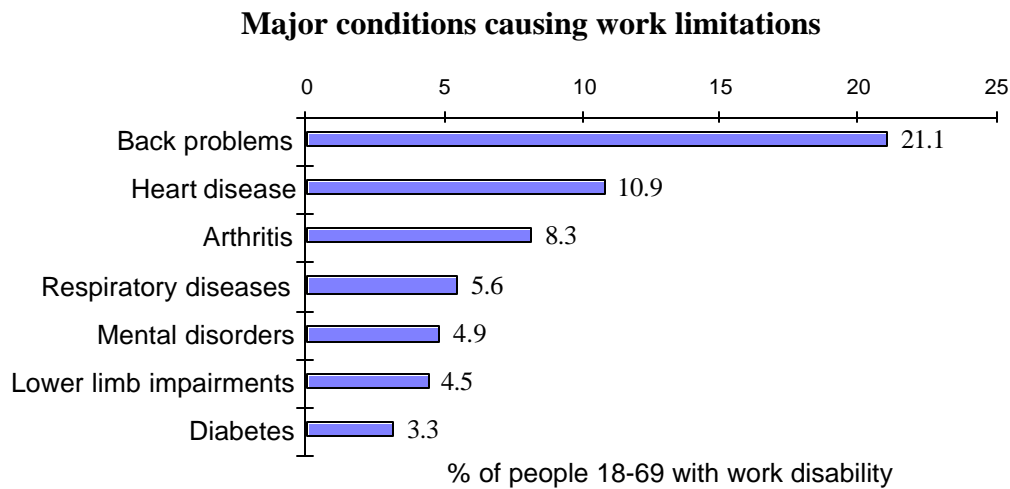
¹⁰ Non-institutionalized persons

Thus in Cambridge, 5.5% of the total working age population has a *work disability*. For people currently in employment, 2.9% have a *work disability*.

Cambridge has a lower incidence of disability than Massachusetts or the U.S. as a whole. Cambridge's strong economic position and high cost of living tend to push people with disabilities out of the city. At the same time factors such as better access to education, jobs, and health care tend to reduce the likelihood of having, or acquiring, a disability.

Most common types of disability

One person out of five with a work disability has a back problem. Heart disease and arthritis are also common causes of disabilities.¹¹



¹¹ Chartbook on Work and Disability in the U.S. – data from National Health Interview Survey 1992

How does disability affect employment status?

The chart below shows that people with disabilities are much less likely to be in the labor force (employed, or unemployed and seeking work) than their non-disabled counterparts. If they are in the labor force, they are much more likely to be unemployed, and more likely to be low earners (for example in Massachusetts, 9.3% of employed people with a work disability were classified as low earners, compared with 5.2% of employed non-disabled people)¹²

From 1990 Census	Cambridge		Massachusetts		U.S.	
	Non-disabled	With work disability	Non-disabled	With work disability	Non-disabled	With work disability
Population (16-64) ¹³	69,329	4,059	3,660,759	284,229	144,497,473	12,826,449
Not in labor force	15,847	2,320	648,339	164,178	29,844,612	7,782,459
%	22.9	57.2	17.7	57.8	20.7	60.7
In labor force	53,482	1,739	3,012,420	120,051	114,652,861	5,043,990
%	77.1	42.8	82.3	42.2	79.3	39.3
<i>Of those in labor force:</i>						
Employed	50,885	1,513	2,817,687	103,121	107,713,743	4,372,041
%	95.1	87.0	93.5	85.9	93.9	86.7
Unemployed	2,597	226	194,773	16,930	6,939,118	671,949
%	4.9	13.0	6.5	14.1	6.1	13.3

One reason for these disparities is the lower educational attainment of people with disabilities. For example, the 1990 Census shows that in Massachusetts 65% of people with disabilities graduated from high school, compared with 87% of non-disabled people. 13% of people with disabilities have completed a four-year college degree, compared with 33% of their non-disabled counterparts.¹⁴ However, more recent surveys indicate that this gap is rapidly narrowing, with increasing proportions of people with disabilities completing high school and gaining college degrees.¹⁵

¹² U.S. Census (1990). Earnings below \$11,570 were considered 'low'.

¹³ Non-institutionalized persons

¹⁴ U.S. Census (1990)

¹⁵ The 2000 N.O.D./Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities.

Summary

- Between 5-10% of the Cambridge working age population has a disability. It is difficult to be more precise because of the difficulties in defining 'disability'.
- People with disabilities are much less likely to be working than their non-disabled counterparts, have lower levels of education, and are more likely to earn low wages.
- Two thirds of people with disabilities who are not working would prefer to be working.
- Cambridge has a lower proportion of people with disabilities than the state or nation as a whole. However, at a rough estimate, this still means that 1,700 people with disabilities in the city are not currently working but would like to find work.¹⁶
- Factors such as age, race, ethnicity, language, gender, education, income, housing, access to health care and disability are all inter-related, necessitating a coordinated approach to improving the labor market position of people with disabilities.

¹⁶ Extrapolated from the U.S. Census figures for Cambridge and the estimate that two-thirds of disabled people not currently working would like to work – a finding from the NOD/Harris Survey on Americans with Disabilities, 2000.

SECTION 3

Barriers to Employment for People with Disabilities

People with disabilities may have to deal with a complex set of barriers to finding and keeping employment. Understanding these barriers, and their interrelationship, is critical in planning effective measures to assist people into work.

Education and skill barriers

Human Resource Professionals consider that the lack of relevant work experience or requisite skills and training are the largest barriers for people with disabilities seeking work.¹⁷ Educational attainment for people with disabilities is increasing – more complete high school and graduate from college now than ever before – but they still lag behind their non-disabled classmates.

Job search barriers

Most jobs are found through friends and family members, or through networking. For those people without professional contacts it can be much harder to find work. Although there are several employment service agencies in Cambridge, such as Career Source, the Cambridge Employment Program, as well as specialist agencies such as Massachusetts Rehabilitation Services, and Vinfen, there are still many people who either do not know where to find help, or who are reluctant to seek help because of previous negative experiences.

Access to information

People may be unable to access information about educational and work opportunities because it is not available in the places they normally visit, is inappropriate to their culture, or is not readily understandable. Resources and services must take into account a variety of communication factors – including people who use American Sign Language, people with learning disabilities and/or limited literacy levels, and speakers of languages other than English.

Welfare benefit barriers

Disability benefits were designed on an all-or-nothing basis – either someone is able to work full-time or not at all. This does not reflect how many people experience their disabilities. For someone with a fluctuating condition, or who is uncertain of the impact of work on their health, the risk of

¹⁷ Cornell University (1999). Disability Employment Policies and Practices in U.S. Federal Government Agencies

potentially losing benefits by returning to work may be too great. Even though recent legislation¹⁸ helps people make a smoother transition from welfare to work, many people with disabilities still feel they may lose out financially by working.

Poverty

Without regular employment, people are more likely to live in poverty. Since people with disabilities often have higher living costs (because, for example, they may have less choice in where they live or shop, or they have to pay for assistance with daily living tasks), this can cause greater hardship than for the general population. Poverty itself can be a barrier to employment – it may be difficult to pay transportation costs, to buy new clothes, or to maintain a car.

Attitudinal barriers

The 1994 N.O.D./Harris survey found that 30% of people with disabilities in the labor market had encountered discrimination. Nearly half of students and trainees with disabilities expected to face discrimination in the workplace. The most common forms of discrimination were being denied a job interview, refused a promotion, or given less responsibility. Inevitably this has a domino effect on the self-confidence and motivation of the individuals themselves, but also on other people with disabilities looking for work. It is not just people with disabilities who report discrimination in the workplace. For example, 43% of respondents to a recent survey of Human Resource Professionals in Federal Government cited attitudes and stereotypes about disabilities as being a major barrier for people with disabilities in the workplace.¹⁹

Labor market barriers

People with disabilities may be unable to find work if there are few jobs available, or the openings available are not suitable. Employers in Cambridge are currently facing labor shortages, but jobs for certain categories of people (such as part-time workers, those with poor basic skills, or poor interpersonal skills) may still be scarce.

Accommodations

The majority of people with disabilities need no accommodations in the workplace. For those that do, most accommodations are inexpensive. However, negotiating with employers can be problematic – especially when the need for the accommodation is not obvious, or could potentially cause resentment among co-workers (such as working flexible hours). In a few cases, complex workplace modifications are required to meet an individual need. Delays in setting up new

¹⁸ For example, the federal Work Incentives Improvement Act (1999)

¹⁹ Cornell University (1999). Disability Employment Policies and Practices in U.S. Federal Government Agencies

equipment and uncertainties over financial responsibilities can strain even positive employer-employee relationships.

Disability-related barriers

A significant proportion of people with disabilities say they are unable to work due to their disabilities. In the most recent N.O.D./Harris Survey (2000), 43% of people with disabilities stated they were unable to work because of their health problem or disability. However, it is probable that at least some of these individuals would be interested and able to work, if they felt suitable opportunities were available – such as part-time work, telecommuting, or work for which retraining or on-the-job training were available.

Transportation

Cambridge has a good system of public transportation - but it is not fully accessible. The MBTA offers a paratransit service ('The Ride') for people with disabilities unable to use public transportation. However, many users complain that it is very unreliable, and demand for this service greatly outstrips supply. Users must be registered with 'The Ride' and have to book their journey ahead of time. There are some wheelchair accessible taxis in the City – but again the service is often unreliable. This can be extremely frustrating for employees and employers alike.

Other forms of discrimination

Disability discrimination can be compounded by other forms of labor market discrimination such as discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, or homelessness.

SECTION 4

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was introduced in 1990. It gives civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion. It provides equal opportunity for people with disabilities in employment, state and local government services, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications.

Title I of the ADA prohibits employers from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in hiring, promoting, training, benefits, and other employment conditions. A person with a disability is someone who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or
- has a record of such an impairment; or
- is regarded as having such an impairment.

A qualified employee or applicant is one who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job.

An employer is required to make an accommodation for a known disability if it would not impose an ‘undue hardship’ on the operation of the employer’s business. An employer is not required to lower quality or production standards to make an accommodation.²⁰

Title II prohibits discrimination by state and local government of qualified individuals with disabilities in the provision of any program or service. Programs must also make reasonable changes in their policies, practices and procedures to avoid discrimination.

Title III prohibits discrimination by “public accommodations” – including restaurants, hotels, retail stores, and doctor’s offices. Reasonable changes in policies, practices and procedures must be made to avoid discrimination. Physical and communication barriers in existing facilities must be removed if this can be done without much difficulty or expense, or alternative methods of providing the service must be offered.

²⁰ Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, 1997

The impact of the ADA

Evidence on the impact of the ADA and other disability civil rights laws is somewhat unclear. In Cambridge, the rehabilitation service providers report that employers are now more aware of disability issues, though many do not understand the full implications of the ADA. However, they also find that some employers are more reluctant to recruit people with disabilities, for fear of potential ADA litigation if the individual was subsequently disciplined or fired.

It is also difficult to determine whether the ADA has led to an increase in the employment rate for people with disabilities, or reduced the level of discrimination in the workplace. Employment rates for people with disabilities have increased over the last 10 years, but other factors such as higher standards of education, a healthy economy, and new technologies have also played important roles. Although there has been an increase in the numbers of people with disabilities employed by federal government, they tend to have lower graded positions and low promotion rates.²¹

The ADA cases that come before the courts are just the tip of the iceberg. The majority of people do not have the resources, confidence, or energy to fight for their civil rights in court. Access to the law is uneven, taking a case to court costs money, and proving discrimination can be difficult, especially when it is subtle. Some courts have turned out to be unsympathetic to ADA cases, and public understanding of disability issues remains low. The ADA cases that are most frequently reported in the media are those that journalists consider trivial or sensationalist issues. Thus while the passage of the ADA has been a major step forward, equality for people with disabilities remains elusive.

On a more positive note, the majority (63%) of people with disabilities believe that life has improved for the disabled population over the last decade, and 41% expect that their own quality of life will improve over the next four years.²² However this is in marked contrast with the expectations of non-disabled people – 76% of whom expect to see improvements in their quality of life over the same period.

Summary

- The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed over a decade ago, prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in employment and other areas of life.
- While awareness of disability issues has increased over the last decade, and people with disabilities feel more optimistic about the future, significant barriers to equality remain.

²¹ GLADNET: Employment Policies for Disabled People in 18 countries: A Review (1997).

²² N.O.D. / Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities (2000)

SECTION 5

Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Cambridge

Rehabilitation agencies

The two state agencies are Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB). In addition, Cambridge has a number of smaller agencies, most of which have contracts with the state agencies to deliver services. These include Vinfen, Greater Boston Rehabilitation Services, North Charles Employment and Training, and Cambridge Cares about Aids. Lesley College offers the Threshold Program – a full-time residential program for young adults with learning disabilities.

Mainstream employment agencies

The main agency is Career Source, which sees over 6,000 clients a year. A more individualized service is offered by other agencies such as the City-funded Cambridge Employment Project.

Overall impressions

Counselors in the rehabilitation and employment agencies are experienced and knowledgeable about their work. They are sensitive to the needs and preferences of their clients, particularly with respect to confidentiality about their disability. Clients are offered a positive and supportive atmosphere – not pushed into jobs too quickly, while encouraged to take a few manageable risks from time to time.

Initial impressions of an organization are important in setting the tone for future relationships. This is an area in which some agencies perhaps fall short of their goals. A couple of examples: MCB has a telephone system based on voice recognition (which rarely seems to work) rather than having calls answered by a receptionist. MRC's Somerville office, which serves Cambridge, is virtually inaccessible by public transportation and is poorly signed. It is hard not to imagine its location on the very edge of the city as reflecting the marginalization of people with disabilities in the community.

Eligibility for services

To be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services from MRC, individuals must have a physical or mental impairment that is a substantial impediment to employment. They must also need, and be able to benefit from, vocational rehabilitation services. MRC determines eligibility by consulting medical records, Social Security records, and the individual. For Massachusetts Commission for the Blind eligibility is more straightforward – all individuals who are determined to be legally blind are referred automatically to MCB.

When ‘mainstream’ employment agencies were asked how they serve individuals with disabilities, their most common response was that they refer these people to MRC. Since around half of people with disabilities have non-severe disabilities, this means that either:

- some people are being referred to MRC and are then found ineligible for their services; or
- mainstream agencies are not recognizing that significant numbers of people using their services probably have non-severe and/or hidden disabilities.

However there is no obvious dividing line between severe and non-severe disabilities. Whether a disability is an issue in employment terms may depend on the type of work, the workplace environment, and the individual’s previous experiences. Thus the clear distinction between ‘disability services’ and ‘mainstream’ services, with separate locations, staff, services, procedures, and resources, may not make much sense from a consumer viewpoint.

Services offered

Each agency offers a different mix of services according to the needs of their client group and their resources. Common services include:

- **Initial assessment.** All agencies place a strong emphasis on working with individuals to discover their individual skills, experience, and aspirations.
- **Work trials and temporary work programs** These assess suitability for certain types of work, as well as establishing regular work habits.
- **Vocational training and education.** MRC is one of the few sources of funding for training and education courses.
- **Work preparation and job search skills** Most agencies provide either one-on-one or group sessions.
- **Job clubs** Job clubs provide opportunities for peer support, and can help sustain motivation to apply for jobs.
- **Supported employment.** A job coach works alongside the client, offering training and support to both client and employer. As the client becomes more confident, the job coach withdraws. If 3-4 clients are placed with the same organization, a job coach may support the ‘enclave’ on a longer term basis.

- **Ongoing employer / employee support** A support worker may meet with the employee on a regular basis. Since some employees may choose not to disclose their disability to their employer, the support worker may pose as a friend meeting for lunch.

What are some of the barriers to finding employment?

It is important to remember that many clients face multiple barriers to employment. For example, it is not unusual for an agency such as Cambridge Cares About Aids to have a client with limited English skills, no High School diploma, drug abuse problems, a record of criminal convictions, and a patchy work record – as well as HIV/AIDS.

Other barriers include:

- **Transportation.** Although the MBTA offers ‘The Ride’ for individuals unable to use public transportation, the unreliability of the service causes difficulties for people using it as a primary means of getting to work. Transportation is probably the biggest barrier for people who are blind or visually impaired.
- **Part-time work** For individuals unable, or unwilling, to work full-time, finding part-time jobs is challenge. Where part-time jobs are available, they are frequently low wage, no benefit positions, with few prospects for advancement.
- **Unrealistic expectations** Some clients have unrealistic expectations of the types of jobs or levels of pay they are likely to find in today’s labor market.
- **Skills gaps** People without jobs may not have the skills and experience that employers are looking for. For example, employers are increasingly emphasizing the need for communication skills, interpersonal skills, flexibility, and computer literacy.
- **Shortage of supervisory staff** Some local employers have become more reluctant to recruit people with learning disabilities because of a shortage of experienced staff to supervise them.

Funding levels

Rehabilitation agencies feel there is insufficient funding to meet the needs of those clients with cognitive and psychiatric disabilities who need long term or ongoing supported employment. The average cost of rehabilitation is rising, as people with less severe disabilities find jobs, leaving behind those needing more support. Funding should perhaps reflect the potential savings to the government of keeping people in employment rather than on welfare.

Outreach work

All rehabilitation agencies are concerned that people with disabilities are not finding their way into the system. They feel that funding constraints limit their ability to do outreach work. Groups who are felt to be missing out are people from minority communities, particularly Spanish speakers and the Haitian community, people with drug and alcohol abuse problems and homeless people. MRC points out that counselors have large caseloads and it can be difficult to keep track of people who do not stay in regular contact. Other agencies mentioned that MRC is considered overly bureaucratic and that some clients prefer using other agencies.

Employment agencies are also stretched. For example, Career Source sees 6,000 clients per year. With only 12 counselors, most clients are encouraged to make use of workshops, self-paced materials and the resource libraries, rather than having one-on-one sessions.

Employer contacts

All agencies feel that employers have little understanding of the ADA or disability issues. Several mentioned that employers may be reluctant to recruit someone with a disability for fear of future ADA litigation. However, as employers struggle to hire sufficient staff in a thriving economy, they appear to becoming less concerned about taking on people with physical disabilities. The situation has not eased as much for people with psychiatric or cognitive disabilities.

A common concern expressed by employers is whether a newly hired worker will be reliable. Rehabilitation counselors explain that they can offer back-up support to both employer and employee – something that the employer would not have if they recruited a ‘regular’ employee.

Counselors emphasize the importance of establishing strong relationships with employers so that they learn to trust the agency and know it is a source of reliable workers.

Coordination between agencies

Overall, the rehabilitation and employment agencies maintain good relationships with one another. The Office for Workforce Development’s Adult Employment Alliance and Job Developers’ Network are found to be very beneficial in keeping staff from different organizations in touch with one another, and providing opportunities for sharing ideas and concerns.

The Workforce Investment Act

The Workforce Investment Act brings together various job training and employment programs into one integrated system of services which all people can access through One-Stop Centers. Vocational Rehabilitation services are included in these services.

Two key elements of the Act are the introduction of One-Stop Centers and Individual Training Accounts:

One-Stop Centers

One-Stop Centers are designed to be a central point for information and advice on careers and training. In Cambridge this is provided by Career Source, on Alewife Brook Parkway. It offers a career resource library, use of computers with internet access, fax, telephone and copier services. Training is available in using the computer, and there are workshops and opportunities to meet employers. For an additional fee, clients can use computer-based tutorials and self-assessment tools to assist in clarifying career goals.

Clients with disabilities will still be referred to existing vocational rehabilitation agencies such as Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). However, it is not clear who will decide whether an individual's disability a) is significant enough to suggest referral to MRC (MRC focuses on helping individuals with severe disabilities), and b) whether the type of support required is best provided by a rehabilitation agency or a mainstream agency. There already seems to be a tendency for mainstream agencies to view all people with disabilities as being covered by vocational rehabilitation, overlooking the fact that many people with hidden or non-severe disabilities ~~who~~ may already use mainstream services.

A further question is the meaning of 'One-Stop' for people with disabilities, if in reality their visit to the One-Stop Center leads to their being referred elsewhere.

Individual Training Accounts

Individual Training Accounts are issued to job seekers to enable them to select their own training programs from an approved list. The aim is to increase consumer choice and to encourage training providers to become more market-oriented.

This may increase access to education and training for some people with disabilities who previously might not have been able to afford or find courses, but there are some potential problems. First, it puts greater onus on the job seeker to choose the right program, which may be difficult for some individuals, such as those with cognitive and/or learning disabilities. It is not clear whether there are any 'second chances' for people who make the wrong choice first time around. Second, it is not clear what will happen if appropriate training is only available in a location that the individual with a disability cannot easily travel to, or where training staff have difficulty accommodating particular needs.

Recommendations

- Increase employer awareness of disability issues. Although all agencies are working on this individually, joint efforts may prove more cost-effective.
- Enhance links between employment and rehabilitation agencies in order to share information and expertise. Possibilities include staff exchanges, job shadowing, and regular networking meetings.
- Increase funding to rehabilitation agencies to reflect the rising costs of providing services to a client group with more complex needs.
- Undertake outreach work to communities and populations that are not currently receiving services from any agency.
- Reduce the bureaucracy involved in delivering services – particularly around establishing eligibility – in order to provide a more customer-focused service.
- Ensure that One-Stop arrangements work effectively for people with disabilities. One-Stop staff may need disability awareness training.
- Produce a user-friendly guide for consumers on how to make best use of an Individual Training Account – and how to find good quality education and training programs.

SECTION 6

Comments from People with Disabilities

As part of this study discussions were held with people with disabilities from the Boston Center for Independent Living and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Job Club. The following issues were raised:

The major barrier to finding and keeping work is that employers know little about disabilities. Employers need much more education about disability issues and to understand that many accommodations are easy and inexpensive to provide.

It is difficult to find part-time work. Most employers want full-time employees. Yet often people can only work part-time or they risk losing benefits.

A disability may require a change in career direction. The lack of relevant work experience is a disadvantage when applying for jobs, and retraining can be expensive. It is often dealing with a change in self-image that is the most difficult part. An individual who took pride in doing a particular type of work now has to adjust to a new way of life.

The stress of looking for a job can sometimes lead to flare-ups or worsening of a condition. This can lead to ambivalent feelings towards job seeking.

In today's labor market, there are no more 'jobs for life'. People cannot be certain that once they find a job, they will keep it. This puts added stress on the job seeker.

Most jobs are found through networking. However, it is difficult to be part of the network without first being employed. People with disabilities need more opportunities to network with employers and potential coworkers.

Employers do not like to see gaps in employment history. This applies even where the job applicant can show they were engaged in constructive and relevant activities in the meantime - such as writing, studying, organizing community events, or homemaking.

It is difficult to deal with rejection from employers. Rejection implies that an individual's skills and experience are not valuable.

Recommendations for increasing employment opportunities

- Establish employer award schemes to encourage employers to 'go the extra mile' for people with disabilities, and to identify employers that are genuinely committed to employing people with disabilities.
- Develop a Cambridge-wide network of employers who are committed to employing people with disabilities.
- Encourage closer links between disability organizations and the Chamber of Commerce
- Provide opportunities for people with disabilities to network with employers. For example, City of Cambridge meetings with local residents may provide opportunities for residents to meet with City managers.
- Provide information and education for employers about disability and accommodations. While people with disabilities want to take a major or leading role in devising and delivering such training, they also stress that employers (and the non-disabled community in general) have a responsibility to educate themselves about disability issues.
- Offer Disability Awareness Training - in schools, colleges, and community organizations
- Empower people with disabilities to speak for themselves

SECTION 7

People with Disabilities Who are Outside ‘The System’

Agencies working with people with disabilities in Cambridge share a common concern that there are significant numbers of people who need employment support who are not currently receiving services. These agencies would like to be able to do more outreach work, but feel constrained by current funding levels.

At a conservative estimate there are about 4,000²³ working age adults in Cambridge with a disability that limits their ability to work. Of these around 1,500 are in employment, 200 are unemployed and the remaining 2,300 are not in the labor force. National research²⁴ indicates that the majority of people with disabilities who are not currently in the labor force would like to work.

Budgets for outreach work are limited. Agencies also worry that if their client numbers increase, the quality of services being offered will diminish – especially if many of those outside the system have more complex needs. Without actual data on the numbers of people with disabilities who are not currently being served, it is difficult to argue the case for increased budgets.

Categories of people with disabilities who may be under-served by employment and rehabilitation agencies include:

People with multiple disabilities may fall through the gaps between specialist agencies. For example, an agency supporting people with cognitive disabilities may not have adequate expertise to support someone who also has a visual impairment. One such group identified as currently missing out on employment services in Cambridge are people with psychiatric disabilities who also have alcohol or substance abuse problems.

People facing significant barriers to employment such as homelessness, or being a convicted offender may be directed to non-disability agencies. These individuals may also have a disability and could benefit from the combined expertise of several agencies. For example, psychiatric disabilities are common among homeless people, as are learning disabilities among prison populations.

People who do not consider themselves to be disabled may be reluctant to seek help from a ‘disability’ organization. Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission finds that young people can be hesitant about using their services because they do not accept the label ‘disabled’. Staff attempt to overcome this barrier by using the initials ‘MRC’ in initial presentations and downplaying the stigma

²³ U.S. Census 1990

²⁴ National Organization on Disability / Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities 1994

attached to the label 'disabled' although, in the long term, it is the discriminatory attitude that needs to be changed.

People with less-severe disabilities may fall between 'mainstream' and 'disability' agencies. Mainstream agencies' initial response to questions about disability is frequently to say that people with disabilities are referred to Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. However the Commission's focus is on people with severe disabilities. People with non-severe disabilities may either be referred to rehabilitation services that they do not really need – or may have their disability-related needs overlooked by a mainstream agency.

People trapped in entry level jobs may have no opportunities to develop their skills through education, and may be constantly at risk of losing their job through ill-health, lack of accommodations, discrimination, or transportation problems. These individuals may not know what services are available to help them, or may be viewed as a lower priority by rehabilitation and employment services which focus primarily on finding jobs for people.

People who do not know what services are available. While the names of all newly legally blind people are automatically passed on to the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, there is no equivalent automatic referral system for other rehabilitation services. The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission reports difficulty getting referrals from physicians, perhaps because physicians focus on particular medical conditions rather than the longer term needs of the whole person.

People from minority populations may miss out on services because they do not speak or read English well, because services are not considered to be welcoming or appropriate to their cultural background, or because of racial discrimination.

People who do not expect to work because they have previously been institutionalized, and/or their families and caregivers have low expectations of their potential. Some people with disabilities believe – in some cases justifiably – that they may be financially worse off in employment than on state benefits.

People who have given up looking for work because of frustration, discrimination, lack of transportation, or poor service by agencies they believe should be helping them.

Ways to increase access to services

- Conduct and disseminate research into the numbers and needs of people who may not be using existing services, to provide evidence to support applications for additional funding.
- Encourage cross-agency cooperation to offer a seamless service to clients
- Offer disability awareness training to staff in ‘mainstream’ employment agencies.
- Provide information about services in multiple locations – health centers, shops, libraries – and ensure staff there know where to refer people for further help
- Provide information on services in other languages besides English.
- Link up with local minority communities to ensure they have access to relevant information and services
- Ensure that the employees of rehabilitation and employment services reflect the diversity of the Cambridge population they serve – including by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and past users of services.
- Provide accurate information to people considering a return to work about the financial benefits and drawbacks of employment.
- Provide opportunities for peer support groups to form and develop.
- Promote local success stories so that Cambridge residents hear positive messages about rehabilitation services and employers.

SECTION 8

People with Psychiatric Disabilities and Employment

According to a report by the Massachusetts-based *Friends of the Psychiatrically Disabled*, just 15% of people with severe and persistent mental illness have any type of paid work. Less than one half of one percent earn sufficient wages to leave the Social Security system.²⁵

Yet there are also many examples of people with psychiatric disabilities being successful at work and making great contributions to their organizations and society. Work itself is often therapeutically beneficial to people with severe mental illness, providing structure and meaning to life. For others, however, work conditions can be stressful, and a potential trigger of a relapse.

A common message from both professionals and job seekers with disabilities in Cambridge is that people with psychiatric disabilities face the toughest battle in finding work. Employers, desperate to find skilled workers in a tight labor market, are increasingly willing to consider people with disabilities – yet people with psychiatric disabilities are still sidelined because of the fear and stigma of mental illness.

Because of the extraordinary stigma associated with mental illness, this chapter is devoted to providing an overview of the barriers to employment for people with psychiatric disabilities and suggesting how some of these barriers might be overcome.

Discrimination

People with psychiatric disabilities face prejudice and discrimination from employers, coworkers, and the population at large. There is generally much fear and little understanding of mental illness. Whether, when, and how to disclose a mental illness is a difficult decision to make. Research indicates that those who have job coaches provided by rehabilitation agencies generally disclose their condition to the employer, and have few problems.²⁶ Those without job coaches are less likely to disclose, and if they do, they are more likely to suffer negative consequences.

What would help?

- Educating employers and the general public about mental illness
- Improving the media portrayal of people with psychiatric disabilities

²⁵ Barriers to Employment and Education for Adults with Psychiatric Disabilities, July 1998, Friends of the Psychiatrically Disabled

²⁶ Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University (1999). A national survey of professionals and managers with psychiatric conditions: A portrait of achievements and challenges.

- Providing adequate funding for rehabilitation services such as job coaches to work with both client and employer

Low expectations of professionals

Practitioners sometimes have low expectations of people with psychiatric disabilities in the workplace. They may be more focused on controlling ‘symptoms’ than on re-integration into the community. Some efforts to provide help and support may inadvertently encourage a ‘learned helplessness’ among people with psychiatric disabilities.

What would help?

- Raising awareness of the therapeutic benefits of working
- Publicizing success stories of people making a successful transition to work

Low self-esteem

People with psychiatric disabilities frequently have low self-esteem and lack self-confidence. This makes it difficult for job seekers to sell their skills to potential employers, and to be persistent in seeking work. Peer support is important in boosting morale, self-confidence, and a sense of empowerment. Initiatives such as ‘club houses’ provide daily activities, opportunities to develop work skills, and an environment for social interaction.

What would help?

- Increasing opportunities for peer support such as peer counselors and buddies.
- Encouraging people in work to tell their stories – at meetings, events, and in print

North Charles Community Career Links hosts monthly meetings in local restaurants for former clients who are in employment. These events provide opportunities for networking and mutual support.

Fear of losing benefits

Even though it is often possible to continue receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) benefits while working, many people with psychiatric disabilities do not know this. The rules are complex and confusing, and benefit recipients are often given incorrect information by advisors²⁷. Similarly, state health insurance is available in Massachusetts to those leaving SSI and SSDI, but those who could benefit may be unaware, or may have been

²⁷ Barriers to Employment and Education for Adults with Psychiatric Disabilities, July 1998, Friends of the Psychiatrically Disabled

misinformed by health care practitioners. As a result some people decide they cannot afford to take a risk and choose to stay out of the workforce.

What would help?

- Improving quality and availability of information about the impact of working on benefits

Low awareness of the Americans with Disabilities Act

Many people with psychiatric disabilities do not know about their rights under the ADA, and in particular, their rights to reasonable job accommodations. For the general public, disability and ADA are associated with physical access issues, not with changing work schedules or reducing stress levels.

What would help?

- Providing more information on the ADA as it relates to psychiatric disabilities

Difficulties in negotiating accommodations

Many people with psychiatric disabilities are stuck in a Catch-22 situation – they cannot ask for a job accommodation without disclosing their disability, yet disclosure may lead to discrimination and isolation in the workplace. The most common job accommodations needed are flexible schedules and time off to manage symptoms. Although often inexpensive, the need for these accommodations may be poorly understood by supervisors and coworkers, leading to resistance and resentment. Finding suitable part-time work is difficult – yet many people with psychiatric disabilities are unable to work full time, either because of their condition, or to avoid losing state benefits.

It is usually easier for people in managerial and professional jobs to secure the job accommodations they need. A study by Boston University²⁸ found that professionals and managers with psychiatric disabilities deal with their disability by taking longer breaks, modifying daily duties and working flexible or reduced hours. In most cases these accommodations were not formally negotiated, and did not depend on disclosure of their disability. That said, the majority had disclosed their disability to their employer and/or coworkers, mostly with no regrets.

What would help?

- Training for employers on making accommodations
- Encouraging a greater awareness and understanding of mental illness
- Persuading more employers to adopt flexible work patterns and offer part time opportunities

²⁸ Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University (1999). A national survey of professionals and managers with psychiatric conditions: A portrait of achievements and challenges.

- Training for employees in how to negotiate with employers for accommodations

Education and Career Development

Many people with psychiatric disabilities have missed out on education. They may have poor basic skills, and need help with reading, writing and math. For others the onset of mental illness is during the college years. Once out of the education system, it can be difficult to get back in because of financial barriers, institutional resistance, and low self-confidence.

For those able to work, the reality is often a low-paid, low-status job. Without funding and opportunities to take further education and training it is difficult to develop new skills and aim for higher level jobs.

What would help?

- Closer cooperation between basic education and mental health professionals
- Ensuring that educational institutions have an understanding of mental illness
- Encouraging employers to offer more career development opportunities to entry-level employees
- Employment and education fairs to promote opportunities for advancement

How could the City of Cambridge help overcome these barriers?

- Educate employers and local residents about psychiatric disabilities.
- Organize a Cambridge Mental Health Awareness Week.
- Encourage employers to offer flexible work conditions, and promote benefits of alternative work arrangements, such as involvement in ‘club houses.’
- In partnership with local agencies, produce and disseminate user-friendly information on benefits and services available to people with psychiatric disabilities.
- Consider ways to reduce barriers for people with psychiatric disabilities wanting to work for the City of Cambridge – for example by offering more part-time opportunities.

SECTION 9

The Employers' Perspective

Employers, like the general population, may know little about disability issues, and may feel uncomfortable talking about disability. Their focus is hiring good people and getting the job done. They want to avoid having to make costly accommodations or significant changes to existing practices. They are fearful of being sued under the ADA - sometimes to the point of being reluctant to hire someone with a disability.

Employers believe disability-related accommodations are likely to be expensive. These are rarely compared with non-disability related accommodations that may be made in the workplace (for example, allowing a parent to change hours to fit in with child care arrangements, or replacing an uncomfortable chair). They also may not know where to go for advice on accommodations and good practice.

Employers want to:

- find skilled, flexible and hard-working employees
- retain good employees
- find cost-effective ways of reaching potential employees
- have a good reputation in the local community
- hear about business issues, rather than social / civil rights issues.
- know how to talk about and manage disability issues in the workplace

Employers do not want to:

- worry about potential lawsuits under the ADA
- pay for expensive accommodations
- deal with bureaucracy and 'government programs'
- become experts in disability issues
- change their policies and procedures to accommodate one individual
- incur additional recruitment and retention costs.

Recruitment methods – the realities

Most employers recruit staff through informal networks rather than through formal advertising of positions. They stress the importance of ‘soft skills’ such as flexibility, reliability, and communication skills.²⁹ This creates two disadvantages for people with disabilities. First, they are often not part of the network, and hence may not find out about potential job opportunities, or have useful contacts who can provide the most credible references. Second, employers may (subconsciously) regard an applicant’s disability and need for job accommodations as evidence of inflexibility.

Human Resource managers in Cambridge and in the rest of the U.S. are generally positive about recruiting people with disabilities.³⁰ They indicate that they would be happy to recruit people with disabilities, provided that they have the right skills and experience. While it is true that some people with disabilities may lack experience, many do not. It is possible that this reflects (albeit unconscious) disability discrimination occurring in the organization.

Rehabilitation agencies in Cambridge adopt a range of methods to convince employers to recruit people with disabilities. One way is to argue a strict business case: the person with a disability is the best person for the job, and that the disability is not a relevant factor. Another approach is to appeal to the employer’s sense of social justice. The argument is that it is beneficial to the wider community for people with disabilities to be employed, and that as long as the employer is convinced that the applicant is likely to be able to do the job effectively, then they are willing to give them a chance. This approach is often found to work where the employer has friends or family members with disabilities, and, if a successful match is made, often leads to further placements.

The complexities of the different strategies required are illustrated by one local agency, where the project coordinator uses two separate business cards. One uses the name ‘*Cambridge Cares About AIDS*’, the other has a neutral-sounding ‘*Job Connection*’, depending on her assessment of the employer’s attitudes and client preferences about disclosure.

Disability and diversity

Many U.S. employers are involved in diversity initiatives in the workplace. In some cases this is in response to allegations of inequality, in others it stems from a realization that a workforce that is more representative of its customer base may be better placed to meet its customers’ needs. It is concerning how often disability is either ignored by these diversity initiatives, or tagged on at the end of existing programs. These organizations are failing to recognize the large numbers of customers with disabilities in the community.

²⁹ Moss, P., and Tully, C., (1999) Big City Labor Markets, inner-city workers: An Employer’s eye view.

³⁰ See for example, Disability Employment Policies and Practices in U.S. Federal Government Agencies. (1999)

What would help employers recruit more people with disabilities?

Information and Advice

Employers want to efficiently locate information on disability issues, including accommodations. Advice from employer organizations like the Chamber of Commerce may be seen as more credible, more employer-focused, than advice given by rehabilitation agencies. They want to hear how other employers have solved similar problems. An excellent national resource that could be used is the Job Accommodation Network. Employers could be encouraged to network, possibly using the framework of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities 'Business Leadership Network'.

Promoting good practice

Employers like to be receive awards - it is good publicity for the employer, and can increase employee morale. Award ceremonies are also an opportunity to educate employers about the skills of people with disabilities. The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission makes an award to employers who have demonstrated good practice - more Cambridge employers could be encouraged to participate in these events.

Another approach is to encourage employers to work towards a good practice standard. For example the UK has a "*Positive about Disabled People*" symbol which is used on job advertisements by employers who have made certain commitments to recruiting and retaining disabled people.



Disability Awareness Training

The majority of employers are aware of the ADA. However, the emphasis on legislative changes has left employers with concerns that they may be sued, or unable to fire an unproductive employee. In addition to ADA training, employers need to know about disability from a business perspective. For example, how supervisors can assess performance fairly when an accommodation has been made, or understanding the role and function of a job coach. In many respects the skills required are those required by all managers - it is important to stress that these are '*management*' skills not '*disability*' skills.

A coordinated approach from human service agencies

Employers do not want to have to deal with numerous agencies, all with different procedures and eligibility rules, to fill their vacancies. In Cambridge, the Office for Workforce Development encourages coordination of rehabilitation and employment agencies through the Job Developers' Network and Cambridge Employment Alliance. It has however proved more difficult to maintain employer involvement in these networks.

Recommendations

- Offer an annual Cambridge award to an employer that demonstrates genuine commitment to employing and developing people with disabilities. Encourage greater involvement of Cambridge employers in existing award schemes, such as the ones organized by Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.
- Introduce and promote a good practice standard for employers.
- Offer Disability Awareness Training to employers and their staff. Train local people with disabilities as trainers to increase links between employers and people with disabilities, as well as providing income opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Offer workshops on disability and employment for Chamber of Commerce members.
- Provide a central resource point for employers seeking advice about employing/retaining people with disabilities, perhaps through the Chamber of Commerce. Publicize the national Job Accommodation Network hotline and website.
- Support employer networks on disability. Investigate the Business Leadership Network from the President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities.
- Encourage employers to become involved with mentoring and internship programs to give people with disabilities work experience and networking opportunities, and to demonstrate to employers that people with disabilities make good employees.

SECTION 10

Career Development

This report has thus far focused mainly on unemployment; however many people with disabilities who are currently in work are under-employed, or lack opportunities for career development.

Employers tend to invest more in the education and training of younger employees and higher-level employees. Employers are also more likely to pay for job-specific skills (such as training in a particular software package, or improving customer service skills) than in generic skills and education (such as enhancing communication skills, or achieving a GED). Thus while employees may receive training that helps them in their current jobs, they are less likely to receive training that will help them progress to a higher level within the organization, or move to a different job. The impact of this on people with disabilities is greater than for the working population in general, since they are more likely to be working in entry-level jobs, and are generally older than the average employee.

Many people, both with and without disabilities, invest in their own career development. However, education can be very expensive, and for families with low or variable incomes, the cost can be prohibitive. Lack of time for studying is also a major barrier. While there is a wide range of institutions and courses available in the Boston area (and, increasingly, on-line) it is difficult for the consumer to assess either the cost-benefit of tuition, or the marketability of acquired skills to future employers.

Harvard University's Bridge to Learning and Literacy provides free courses in literacy, math computer skills, English as a second language, and GED preparation to employees during work-time. The program aims to reach 500 workers per year. Surveys show that employees are particularly keen to improve their computer skills, and see education as a means to improve their future career prospects. The University benefits by having workers with better customer service skills, higher levels of motivation, lower turnover, and an enhanced reputation in the community.

The business case argument that points to the lower turnover rate for employees with disabilities than for other employees may unintentionally reinforce existing prejudices. Many of these employees may be staying in jobs longer than their coworkers because they know how difficult it can be to find work elsewhere, rather than out of increased loyalty to their employer. That said, reducing turnover, especially at a time of labor market shortage, is in any employer's interest. Providing opportunities for employees to improve their education and skills is an effective way to

improve retention rates by increasing job satisfaction, and also to prepare employees for jobs at higher levels within the organization.

A significant number of people with disabilities, both in and out of the workplace, lack basic literacy and math skills, and over a third have not completed High School. As the workplace becomes more complex, job opportunities for these individuals will become increasingly scarce. Nearly half of all new jobs generated in Massachusetts require a bachelor's degree or higher.³¹

The Community Learning Center, funded by the City of Cambridge offers a range of free basic education courses to local residents, including preparation for GED and college-level courses at Bunker Hill Community College. However, the number of people that can receive help is limited. It can also be difficult to persuade people to join classes - many potential clients have had negative experiences associated with school in the past, or feel they have neither the time nor energy for studying.

Recommendations

- Encourage employers to invest in the education and skills of all their employees – including entry-level employees, and those working part-time.
- Work with employers to offer and promote basic education courses, GED preparation, and English as a second language. Ensure that these learning opportunities take account the needs of workers with disabilities – for example, those with learning disabilities.
- Provide information to entry-level employees on the benefits of education, opportunities for career progression, and how to find an appropriate course

³¹ Massachusetts Job Outlook through 2006

SECTION 11

The City of Cambridge as an Employer

The City of Cambridge should take a leading role in employing people with disabilities for a number of reasons:

- It is one of the largest employers in Cambridge.
- It can more readily achieve its mission of serving the residents of Cambridge if it has a workforce that represents the local community.
- As part of its services to the community it should be aiming to improve the employability and earning capacity of local people.
- It can influence its suppliers and contractors to adopt good employment practice.

Numbers of people with disabilities employed by the City

In 1998, the City of Cambridge conducted a baseline survey of city employees, offering them the opportunity to self-identify as having a disability. Out of a total workforce of 3,070 people, only 10 employees indicated that they had a disability.

U.S. Census figures for 1990 indicated that 5.5% of the total population of Cambridge between the ages of 16-64 had a *work disability*, defined as a health condition lasting over 6 months which limits the kind or amount of work a person can do. Of the labor force population (i.e. those who are currently working, or are unemployed but actively seeking work) the percentage with a *work disability* was 3.1%.

Another survey on the incidence of disability is the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). This uses a broader-based definition of disability than the Census, and is closer to the definition used by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While SIPP data is not available at city level, on a national level the 1994/95 SIPP survey showed that 18.7% of the U.S. population between the ages of 15-64 had a disability. Of these 8.7% had a severe disability and 10% had a non-severe disability.

Regardless of which definition is used to provide a baseline, there are significantly fewer people with disabilities employed by the City than population estimates would predict. Admittedly, employees with hidden disabilities often choose not to disclose their disability to their employer, especially if they have concerns about the impact of disclosure on their careers. Overall, however, a comparison of the data from the City survey to the estimates from these national population surveys highlights the need for the City to take more action to recruit and retain people with disabilities.

Job Descriptions

The majority of city job postings follow ADA guidance by distinguishing between the essential and marginal functions of the job, and by focusing on the outcomes of tasks, rather than the manner in which they are performed. However some city jobs are advertised in a way which could be out of step with ADA guidelines. Some recent examples:

Administrative Assistant, Department of Public Works

"Physical Demands: Frequent use of hands and arms to handle and manipulate multiple tasks involving computer based activities including creation of spreadsheets, databases, and word processing documents...."

- there are other ways to use computers other than with hands and arms, such as using speech recognition software

Community School Program Director, Human Services

"Physical Demands:....employee must occasionally transport materials weighing up to 50 pounds from one site to another"

- this is probably not an essential job function – unless there were no feasible alternative ways of transporting materials.

Senior Clerk and Typist, Human Services

"Physical Demands:Sufficient ability to lift and transport approximately 10 pounds to other city locations"

-the only reference to lifting in Essential Duties is 'provide back-up support for delivery of mail...'. It is thus probably not an essential function of the job.

Administrative Assistant, MIS

"Minimum Requirements: ...A bachelor's degree is preferred."

- it is not clear from the description of the administrative tasks described that a bachelor's degree is relevant to this position. This might disadvantage someone with less education, but considerable relevant work experience.

Reasonable Accommodations

Although the City is committed to making accommodations for qualified people with disabilities, this is not always made clear to potential job applicants. For example, job postings state the number of hours per week the person is expected to work, and usually specify start and finish times. A job seeker with a disability who needs to work non-standard hours might be deterred from applying, even though some positions may be suitable for part-time hours, reduced hours, job sharing, or flex-time arrangements.

A standard phrase on all job postings stating that the City of Cambridge will make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities (a 'qualified' individual is one who is able to perform the essential functions of the job, with or without job accommodations) might encourage more applications from people with disabilities. It also indicates to the community that the City is committed to recruiting people with disabilities.

Although the City will make accommodations for interview candidates with disabilities, the responsibility is on the individual to disclose their disability and make a request for an accommodation. It should be remembered that for an applicant uncertain about the impact of disclosure this may be a difficult decision to make. Most interviews are arranged by telephone, but where interview dates are notified in writing, applicants could be informed of their right to accommodations at that stage.

Standard Affirmative Action / Equal Opportunity phrase

The official version that should be used on all City job postings, is:

"The City of Cambridge is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer. Women, minorities, veterans and people with disabilities are strongly encouraged to apply. City of Cambridge residents especially are encouraged to apply."

However, some job postings use older versions, such as:

"The City of Cambridge is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer (voluntary information as to minority status, gender, and income is welcome). City of Cambridge residents, especially, are encouraged to apply."

Departments using non-standard wording include Human Services and Traffic & Parking. It is recommended that all departments use the standard wording to ensure consistency.

Publicizing City vacancies

The City HR department is committed to opening up opportunities to as many Cambridge residents as possible. Job vacancies are advertised in the Globe and Cambridge newspapers, posted on public bulletin boards in City buildings, including Public Libraries, and are sent to community agencies/groups and active Cambridge job applicants. All job vacancies are also listed on the City's web site. However, when asked what more the City could do to help them find work, several local people with disabilities requested information about job opportunities with the City. This was also mentioned by a couple of rehabilitation agencies. It may be that some residents do not know where to find job vacancy information, despite its wide circulation, or they believe that not all City jobs are openly advertised. Either way, the City should be alert to opportunities to make this information more widely known in the community.

Affirmative Action

The City is committed to affirmative action for groups who are under-represented in its workforce. The City recognizes four groups of people as having protected status – minorities, women, people with disabilities, and Vietnam era veterans. For this purpose the City defines a person with a disability as a person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, or a person with a record of a substantially limiting impairment. (The ADA definition of disability also includes people who are regarded as having a substantially limiting impairment, but this is not included in the City’s definition of protected status because it would be difficult to determine prior to hiring).

The City has an Affirmative Action Director, and an Affirmative Action Committee, whose membership includes the Director of the Disabilities Commission. The Committee is currently updating the City’s Affirmative Action plan, and will be setting goals for the City by department for each of the four protected status categories. Where there is significant under-representation, membership of a protected status group may be used as a factor in hiring decisions.

Staff training

Currently, managers of City departments and all Department of Human Service staff receive ADA introductory training. The Human Resource Department is currently compiling a training manual for managers, which will include information about disability and the ADA; a handbook for managers on disability and employment is also under review by the Disabilities Commission. Managers and staff also need training in disability awareness as well as the ADA, so that they have a better understanding of the context of the legislation and become more familiar with disability issues. It is also important that disability issues are integrated into other areas of staff training, so working with, and providing services to, people with disabilities is seen as just a part of everyday life.

Providing opportunities to people with disabilities

There are a number of ways in which the City could assist people with disabilities find employment – both within the City workforce and with other local employers. Some examples:

- guarantee an interview to individuals with disabilities who meet the minimum job requirements, with an offer of feedback from Human Resources staff for unsuccessful applicants. This would give the person an improved chance of being hired, but even if unsuccessful he/she could gain useful interview practice.

- offer internships (paid or unpaid) to people with disabilities. The work experience and reference would be valuable for the individual, and City employees would have the opportunity to work alongside people with disabilities, thus helping to breakdown barriers.
- work with local disability organizations such as Vinfen and the Greater Boston Rehabilitation Service to offer supported employment opportunities.
- create more part-time positions. In many cases, clients are looking for part-time employment. The City could think creatively about how existing full-time job openings could be reorganized to create more opportunities for local people.

Monitoring Progress

The City needs up-to-date statistics on employees with disabilities in order to monitor the success of its initiatives. However there is much sensitivity around collecting data of this type. Some people may not wish to identify themselves as having a disability - due to social stigma, internalized oppression and other factors. There are those who fit the ADA definition of disability, but who would not consider themselves disabled; others may fear that disclosing a hidden disability (e.g. a mental health condition) might harm their career prospects. The more that employees see that the City is genuine in its commitments to recruit and retain people with disabilities, the more likely they will feel confident about self-disclosing.

Instead of asking staff to return a form only if they have a disability, all staff should be asked to complete a monitoring form indicating whether or not they have a disability they wish to disclose. This might encourage a higher rate of returns from employees, and would allow response rates to be monitored. This form could also ask questions about gender, race, ethnicity, and Veteran status. Respondents should be reassured that the information will only be used for monitoring purposes, and will be separate from any requests for accommodations, decisions on hiring, and promotions.

City Contracting

The City has considerable influence in the community in terms of its purchasing power. It already takes steps to ensure that certain contracts must include women and minority-owned businesses. Similar principles could be extended to people with disabilities, by favoring either businesses owned by people with disabilities, or businesses with a policy of employing many people with disabilities. A statement from the City about the employment of people with disabilities in contracting materials also sends out a powerful message to potential contractors.

Pride Packaging is a Cambridge-based business operated by Greater Boston Rehabilitation Service which offers employment and on-the-job training opportunities for people with disabilities in a supported work environment. A number of local businesses subcontract packaging and assembly work to Pride Packaging.

Promoting a positive image of disability in Cambridge

As part of its commitment to recognizing and celebrating the diversity of the population of Cambridge, the City can help overturn stereotypical views of people with disabilities and encourage inclusion. For example the City can support and promote disability arts events, ensure that events have disability access, and include images of people with disabilities in promotional materials. This work is ongoing - the City's Employee Diversity Committee includes a representative from the Disabilities Commission, and the Committee has been a sponsor of Disabilities Commission events.

Recommendations for City of Cambridge	Responsibility
Make a clear statement that the City is committed to recruiting people with disabilities to its workforce	Human Resources
Offer refresher workshops to employees responsible for writing job descriptions to ensure they comply with the ADA	Disabilities Commission
Check that job descriptions are in line with ADA guidance, and include the standard City AA/EO employer phrase	Human Resources
Add statement to all job postings that City will make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities	Human Resources
Ensure interviewees have sufficient opportunities to request accommodations	Human Resources
Review circulation of City vacancies to the local community to ensure people with disabilities can easily find out about jobs.	Human Resources & Disabilities Commission
Take appropriate Affirmative Action steps to overcome under-representation.	Affirmative Action Committee
Offer additional staff training on the ADA and disability awareness	Disabilities Commission
Update handbook for managers on disability awareness and ADA	Human Resources & Disabilities Commission
Consider guaranteeing interviews to applicants with disabilities who meet minimum job requirements	Human Resources
Establish internship opportunities for people with disabilities	Human Resources & Disabilities Commission
Work with local supported employment agencies	Human Resources & Disabilities Commission
Monitor composition of workforce by disability	Human Resources
Contract with organizations that are run by, or have a good reputation for employing people with disabilities	Purchasing Dept.
Promote a positive image of disability in the community	Diversity Committee & Disabilities Commission

SECTION 12

Conclusions

Approximately 4,000 people of working age in Cambridge have a disability. Compared to their non-disabled counterparts, they are much less likely to be in the labor market, are more likely to be unemployed or under-employed, and are more likely to have low earnings. National surveys indicate that the majority of people with disabilities who are not in employment would like to work.

Cambridge currently has a strong economy. Employers are struggling to find workers to fill positions. This situation has benefited some individuals who in the past have had difficulties finding work, but there are still many people with disabilities who cannot find employment.

People with disabilities face numerous barriers to employment, including transportation difficulties, fear of losing benefits, disability discrimination, and sometimes a lack of relevant skills and experience. The complexities of people's individual circumstances mean that these barriers cannot be tackled in isolation from one another, and that there are no 'one size fits all' solutions.

There are too few part-time jobs available for those people who are not able to, or do not wish to, work full-time. Where there are part-time opportunities, these are often poorly paid with no health insurance. Thus some people with disabilities are kept out of the labor market; they cannot work full-time for fear of losing Social Security benefits, and they cannot find part-time vacancies. A more creative approach to designing jobs would offer more flexibility, perhaps giving people the chance to start with part-time hours and then increase to full-time at some later date.

The Americans with Disabilities Act has had some success in terms of the numbers of people with disabilities in employment a decade after the Act was passed. However, disability discrimination is still widespread, and few people have the financial or emotional resources to take legal action against an employer.

More jobs are filled through informal networking than through formal recruitment methods. It is difficult for people on 'the outside' of this information loop to have a chance to compete for these jobs. There are two approaches to solving this; the first looks at ways to help people with disabilities to network such as through mentoring; the other looks at ways of encouraging employers to think beyond their usual contacts in order to increase the diversity within their workforce.

There appears to be a disjunction between rehabilitation and mainstream employment services, with the result that people with disabilities may fall into the gaps between services. Although staff are experienced and committed to doing a good job for their clients, the system itself is complex and somewhat bureaucratic, and people with disabilities have too little say in the planning of services.

Rehabilitation agencies are under-funded when it comes to serving a population with complex needs and reaching out to those not currently in the system. The nature of rehabilitation is changing – there are more clients with psychiatric and cognitive disabilities who need ongoing job support rather than one single intervention. The current labor market offers fewer jobs for those with low levels of skills.

Rehabilitation agencies are concerned that significant numbers of people with disabilities do not currently have access to their services. There are many reasons for this, including language and cultural differences, complex eligibility rules, lack of information, and previous bad experiences with looking for work. Since these people are not in contact with support agencies, it is harder to plan services that meet their needs.

Many employers lack of familiarity with disability issues. Employers make too many assumptions about the skills and reliability of employees with disabilities. Job applicants are not given enough opportunities to dispel myths and prejudices. Small employers especially need more employer-focused information about how to recruit, accommodate, and retain individuals with disabilities.

The focus of rehabilitation agencies is generally on getting people into jobs. However, since many entry level positions offer little scope for advancement, and individuals often have few resources to invest in their own development, people can get stuck in low-paid jobs with low job security and minimal, if any, benefits.

The ‘internet age’ is bringing new jobs to the area, and is changing the way in which business operates. Technology can open up new opportunities for people with disabilities – or, if poorly designed, can create additional barriers.

Young people leaving the school system need guidance and support if they are to make a successful transition into employment. They need greater opportunities to explore a range of career options, to test their abilities and interests, and to develop a variety of skills.

The City of Cambridge is a major employer in Cambridge, provides many services to local people, and plays an important role in the business, environmental, and cultural life of the city. In all these roles its policies and practices can make a big difference to the lives of local people with disabilities.

SECTION 13

Recommendations

Specific recommendations are made throughout the body of this report. Rather than repeat these here, this section draws together some of the key themes that emerge from the research.

There needs to be greater awareness of disability issues, both among employers and the general population. While people with disabilities want to play a major part in the education process, the key responsibility rests with the non-disabled community to educate themselves.

Support agencies should work in close partnership in order to meet the multiple and complex needs of both job seeker and employer, and to make efficient use of finite resources.

Increased outreach services are needed to reach people with disabilities who are not currently receiving the support they need to find employment. This work will require coordination and funding by human service agencies. It may be necessary to undertake further research in order to quantify and understand the needs of these populations.

More choice should be available to people with disabilities. This includes being able to make choices about the types of education and training needed, whether to use rehabilitation or mainstream services, whether to disclose a hidden disability, and what types of support are needed.

People with disabilities need to have a greater say in how services are organized and delivered in order to achieve independence and full participation in society. Although the actual mechanisms for inclusion and participation may vary from program to program, the principle should apply to all programs.

New technology offers new opportunities for people with disabilities by removing physical and communication barriers between friends, coworkers, and customers. The Cambridge area is home to many new internet companies; it would be exciting to see them all adopt the best principles of universal design in their products and services.

Disability issues should be given a higher priority in workplace diversity initiatives. These should stress the benefits of having a diverse workforce – but also that a diverse workforce is inevitable in today’s world. The skills required to recruit and retain people with disabilities, and to make job accommodations are not new – they are the skills needed of any good manager or supervisor.

The City of Cambridge should commit to taking a leading role in promoting employment equality for people with disabilities, through the services it provides to residents, and as a major local employer. A more diverse workforce enables the City to provide better quality services to its community.